



University of Michigan
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Parent Preferences for Automated Appointment Reminders

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Background

- Patient reminders have been demonstrated to be effective in encouraging childhood immunizations and increasing clinic attendance rates.
- Patient reminders also are a critical component of “meaningful use” criteria for federal efforts to expand the use of electronic health records.
- Although email and cell phone use is commonplace among the general public, anecdotal evidence suggests that practices continue to rely primarily upon mailed or telephone-based reminders for appointments.

Objective

To assist practices in learning their patients’ preferences for immunization and appointment reminders.

Methods

Study Design

A convenience sample of 5 immunization provider sites in Michigan (3 private pediatric practices and 2 public local health departments) assessed immunization and appointment reminder preferences.

Data Source

Practice personnel distributed a survey during registration or check-out over a 1-month period. Respondents (adults) indicated the methods by which they would be interested in receiving immunization and appointment reminders, including electronic messages such as email, SMS text message, or through a telephone call.

Outcome Measures

Primary outcomes were the proportion of respondents with reminder preferences using one or more method of automated reminder, including email, text message, or telephone.

Data Analysis

Chi-square tests to assess the association between reminder method preferences and parent characteristics.

Results

- A total of 1,275 surveys were collected from five provider sites, with 53% from private practices and 47% from health departments.
- Most respondents (58%) were 18-40 years; patient visits were primarily for immunizations (37%), sick visits (22%), or well visits (20%).
- Overall, respondents indicated interest in receiving reminders via telephone (59%), email (45%), or text messages (28%). Few (7%) indicated that they preferred no reminder.
- Preferences for text or email reminders tended to be higher among younger respondents, whereas telephone-based reminders were more frequently indicated by older respondents (Table).

Table. Reminder Preferences by Respondent Age (n=1,275)

Age (years)	n	Telephone (%) [*]	Email (%) ^{**}	Text (%) ^{**}
18-30	368	53	40	34
31-40	368	61	53	33
41-50	258	55	50	28
>=51	281	69	36	11

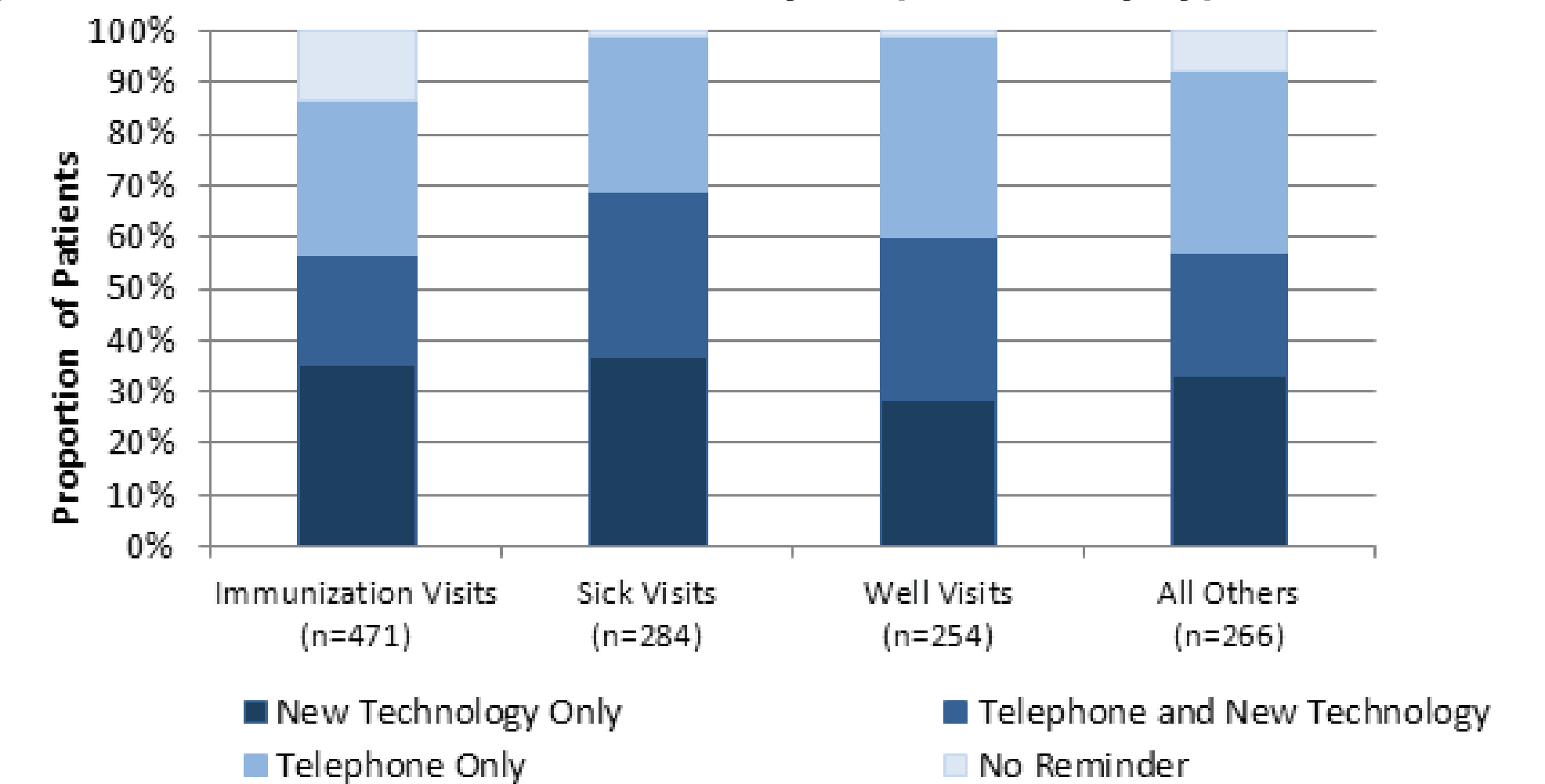
* p<.0004 **p<.0001

- Many respondents (34%) preferred to receive reminders only by email or text, while others (27%) preferred these technologies in combination with a telephone call.
- Approximately one-third of respondents indicated that they preferred only telephone reminders.

Results (cont.)

- The majority of respondents indicated preferences for reminders that include email or text messaging.
- These preferences were consistent across respondents attending all types of visits (Figure).

Figure. Reminder Preferences Indicated by Respondents by Type of Visit Attended



Conclusions

- A substantial proportion of patients prefer to receive reminders only by email or text message.
- Practices should explore the capacity of their practice management systems to collect cell phone numbers and email addresses for use with patient reminder functions.
- Consistent with meaningful use criteria for electronic health records, practices should develop mechanisms to solicit and periodically review patient preferences for the means by which reminders are sent.